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Canadian Embassy

Ambassade du Canada

Jakarta, Indonesia

January 27, 1984

Dear Dr. Owen,

Let me thank you for your letters of October 4th and December 26th, and apologize for not having replied more promptly. As a newly-arrived Ambassador in Jakarta, I wanted to brief myself fully on the East Timor situation before responding to your concerns. More importantly, since you had also enclosed a copy of your letter to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, I did not wish to reply before he had an opportunity to do so.

I have read your letters on the subject of East Timor carefully, but I am afraid I find it difficult to agree with your perceptions of Indonesia and our relations with that country.

While the Canadian government has always had reservations about the manner in which East Timor was incorporated into Indonesia and has made its views known to the Indonesian government on this point in the past, we have also taken into account the situation in East Timor at the time of the Portuguese departure. During the many centuries they were in East Timor, the Portuguese did little to develop the region and their colonial budget put East Timor consistently at the bottom of their priorities. To give just one example, it was only after 400 years of colonization that they built the first elementary school in the capital of Dili, and at the time they abandoned their responsibilities precipitously in 1975, the human and economic resources of the colony were extremely under-developed and there was no viable political infrastructure in place to prepare East Timor for a post-colonial

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existence. Following the Portuguese departure, different groups favoured a variety of political solutions for the colony, including incorporation into Indonesia, with which the people of East Timor have ethnic and cultural affinities.

I am, of course, aware that there have been reports of human rights abuses in East Timor, but these charges are extremely difficult to verify, particularly in a situation where there is armed conflict. While the Canadian government regrets that the integration of East Timor into Indonesia was accompanied by fighting which resulted in human suffering and in casualties, we do recognize that the Indonesian authorities have made a major effort to provide assistance to the people of East Timor and to develop the social and economic infrastructure of the territory. In fact, East Timor has been a priority area for Indonesian development assistance and various visitors to East Timor have observed the improvements carried out by the Indonesian authorities there in the past few years. The Indonesians acknowledge, of course, that because of its history, East Timor is not an economically viable entity and will be a charge upon government revenues for some years to come. For our part, Canadian aid has been channelled through the international relief agencies operating in East Timor - i.e., UNICEF, the Catholic Relief Services and the International Red Cross.

I have the impression as well that the Indonesian position on East Timor is one that enjoys broad popular support in this country. Even though modern Indonesia is a new nation, it has already developed a strong and vital sense of national identity and has been quite successful in accommodating the cultural and linguistic diversity of the many different peoples that make up its population.

I should also point out that while Indonesia is still a poor country, it has experienced over the past decade a period of unprecedented economic growth, accompanied by rising living standards, which only recently has been affected by the slowdown in the world economy. The increase in energy prices was, of course, a factor in stimulating this growth, but credit must also be given to Indonesians for good economic management. While not wishing to exaggerate our role, I would argue that the Canadian development assistance program and the activities of Canadian companies in this country have also made a useful contribution to the economic well-being of the Indonesian people generally.

Yours sincerely,

Maldwyn Thomas

Maldwyn Thomas
Ambassador